

Sacred

THUMBprint

What is God doing to get your attention?



Observer

7 Day

Devotional

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For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

John 3:16,17

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Introduction

There is an interesting science that has developed in recent years that studies ancient fingerprints left on pottery and other objects. Obviously, the scientist cannot tell us who the people are who left those prints but we can be assured by today's scientific methods that these people were as unique as you and me.

There are hand and foot prints in Egypt that date back 4,000 years. There is even a ridged print that could date as far back as 10,000 years.

The ancient Babylonians and Chinese used thumbprints like signatures in official documents and business transactions. Scientists don't know if they understood the uniqueness of each print or if they thought that the touch of the document had some kind of mystic spiritual connection.

Not until about 100 years ago did the science of fingerprinting come to the forefront. Now it is an accepted science used especially in law enforcement.

Take a look at your thumbs. The characteristics of fingerprints include nine patterns with names like "loops and whorls" that are consistent in all humans. The combination of these nine patterns gives each person their own unique set of fingerprints. Reading and pondering the THUMBPRINT Devotionals will certainly affirm the uniqueness of your own spiritual identity but more importantly we will drill deeper into the question, "What is God doing to get your attention?" by exploring how to respond to God's advances.

The truth is, lots of us go along through life just minding our own business when all of the sudden, something happens. It may be bad or good. Either way it is significant, and makes us aware of the circumstances or events that have gotten our attention. It's kind of like a wake-up call. Sometimes we are really shaken up and we want to blame some one or get even or quit.

The purpose of this devotional series is to:

- drill deeper to the awareness of God's presence
- enlighten you by what the Bible says about God's work in your life
- challenge you to authentically respond to God

Throughout the Bible God took action to get people’s attention in as many unique ways as there are thumbprints. God inspired people, warned them, confronted them, saved them, fought for them, fought against them, taught them and loved them. God had his reasons and purposes for taking action in people’s lives.

The six THUMBPRINT profiles are based on the acronym T.H.U.M.B. plus O. Here is how the individual profiles correspond to the letters in the acronym:

Profile	Letter	Description
Pilgrim	T	Thirst: Thirsty for God, longing for the truth
Philosopher	H	Hunger: Hungry for meaning and significance in life
Warrior	U	Undercurrent: Up against unseen forces in life, undercurrents that threaten to carry you away
Prophet	M	Mystery: Curiosity about the mysterious, the awesome works and actions of God
Saint	B	Brokenness: God gets our attention through illness, disappointments, devastation, pain and grief
Observer	O	Observer: Low or no awareness of God’s presence in the circumstances of life but you are watching and waiting

As an Observer you are in the unique and enviable place for God to do incredible things. The Bible is filled with Observers, the Apostles Thomas and Paul are good examples. The premise behind the THUMBPRINT study is that God is the one who initiates a relationship with us. Our task is to respond. From the study of scripture and from the reality of our own experience, we know that God's initiatives are different for every person.

Sometimes he is subtle and sometimes bold. Sometimes his work and actions are easily seen other times they are invisible. What is important to remember is that at the heart of it all, God loves you and even if you doubt his existence, he is still at work to get your attention. Even if you think that you've "given religion or Christianity a shot and nothing happened" God is not done. All I ask is that you allow yourself to go on a journey of discovery. If you do, God will reveal himself.

When God has your attention, things that you thought were once important no longer have the same hold on you. When God gets your attention, your life will never be the same.

Day 1: Observer



I am telling you this story with the full permission of my friend whose prayer is that his story will help you to find hope in your spiritual journey.

The Letter

I received an anonymous letter on a Tuesday after a weekend Christmas concert series that our church was performing for the community. Each night of the series, I got up at the end and said something like, “whatever you are going through, there is hope in Jesus.”

The letter said that the sender was at the concert and heard what I had said and wanted to know if it was true, is there really hope in Jesus?” With that, my journey with Jim began.

Although he didn’t tell me his name in the letter, he opened himself up in a way that nobody had ever communicated with me before. He said that he had suffered for many years with depression as had a number of his siblings. What caught my attention was the paragraph where he described driving around town with a shotgun in the trunk of his car and then sitting for hours in a remote parking lot pointing the barrel of the gun at his head and trying to build up the courage to pull the trigger.

He described his struggle with alcoholism and the impact that it had on his family. Even though Jim was highly educated, skilled and successful by every standard, he was a completely broken man.

He asked me not to try and find out who he was but he did give me a return address. I had only been a pastor for about a year at that point. I was overwhelmed and completely unprepared to deal with something this deep.

I prayed for a couple of days that God would give me wisdom to respond to the letter. In my response, I acknowledged his pain and said that I believed with all of my heart that there **is** hope in Jesus. When I put my response in the mail, I had no confidence whatsoever that I would ever hear from the anonymous writer again.

To my amazement, I did. Over the course of 10 years, Jim and I developed a close friendship where he taught me more about being real with God than I ever taught him.

For example, he taught me more about preaching than all my classes at seminary. One day he came into my office and said, “I think I need to leave the church because your sermons are going way over my head.” I sat back and asked why he felt that way. I knew that my sermons were far from being too academic.

Jim said, and I will never forget it, “I need to hear one thing when I come to church, that God loves me. Rick, just say it over and over to me because I am so thick headed. I forget and I want to believe it is true so just keep on telling me that God loves me.”

Throughout the years I have known Jim and walked with him through his doubts and brokenness, I have seen God do an amazing work of bringing healing and wholeness in his life and family.

I am convinced that Jim would reiterate the Prophet Job’s testimony about his brokenness, “My ears have heard **of you**, but now my eyes **have seen you.**”

So, in honor and respect of my friend, Jim, if you have not heard it yet today, let me tell you, God loves you. He really loves you. It is safe to be broken hearted with him. Jesus can be trusted with the best and worst of who you are. His love for you reaches far beyond your rebellions or disregard for his attempts to get your attention. God deeply, unashamedly loves you.

PRAYER

Lord, I need to hear every day that you love me. Remind me of your love today with the thoughts you inspire, with the people I talk to, with the things that I read and watch, with every breath and heartbeat, remind me again of your love. Amen.

Day 2: Observer



Nicodemus was an important man in first century Jerusalem. He had risen in respect and prominence to be a member of the Sanhedrin, the leaders of the Jewish people. Even though Israel was under Roman rule at the time, the Jews were allowed to choose their own religious leaders. The Sanhedrin, held significant political, social and religious influence with the Jews. Therefore, Nicodemus was a mover and shaker.

Nicodemus was very much aware and involved in the discussions about Jesus and the buzz surrounding his being the Messiah. As if there wasn't enough tension already among the Jews because of the Roman occupation, this carpenter from Galilee had the potential to blow everything up. The delicate peace with Rome, the long-held traditions of the faith and, unfortunately, their place of authority in the community was at risk.

But in spite of the risks and doubts, Nicodemus was an observer. He had listened to the wisdom of Jesus' teaching and watched with wonder the miracles of healing that he was doing. There were rumors floating around of Jesus saying and doing things that even the ancient prophets would never say and could not do. Jesus was unique, different and Nicodemus watched and listened carefully.

Finally, one night he made a under-the-radar visit to Jesus. His purpose was not to argue or debate. He wanted to understand. The discussion was lively. Nicodemus acknowledged that Jesus was doing amazing things but what he wanted to know is, was Jesus the one, the Messiah the Jews had been waiting for? Jesus responded,

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

John 3:16,17

PRAYER

Jesus, I come to you with my questions. I come to you like Nicodemus, risking my reputation, risking my traditions, risking my beliefs, in many ways, I am risking it all. Meet with me and tell me what you know I need to hear and understand. Amen.

Day 3: Observer



We don't know his name, only that he was a thief. It seems harsh and especially cruel that someone who stole something, even a habitual thief, would have to pay the ultimate price for his crime, but there he was. The Romans showed little mercy for a man with his background. Jewish law drew an uncompromising line for thieves as well. Death on a cross is certainly cruel and unusual punishment by today's laws and standards but in first century Israel, everyone knew the consequences of such a sin as stealing a donkey or money or a loaf of bread. Death.

This particular thief was an observer. He had been around, and was very much aware of the scandals and big news around town. His sorry life was about to be over when in the midst of the worst torture imaginable he realized that he was being crucified next to a celebrity. From his response, it is obvious he knew who Jesus was, knew his reputation as a righteous man and very likely had heard him speak or even seen him do a miracle. The thief on the cross next to Jesus had seen and heard enough to know that Jesus did not deserve to be there.

This only accentuated his own guilt and the guilt of the thief on the cross on the other side of Jesus. Perhaps they were partners in crime. Maybe they only knew each other in the context of dying together but either way, their perception of Jesus was as far from each other as the right is from the left.

The first thief asked Jesus a bold question, a question that could be considered the first "hail Mary" ever thrown. "Jesus, remember me in when you come into your kingdom." He had nothing to lose and everything to gain, it was completely up to Jesus. Jesus' reply is the hope of all observers who are willing to at last believe the truth of Jesus,

"Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43)

Like I said, the difference between thief number one and thief number two is as far as the right is from the left, as far as heaven is from hell.

PRAYER

Jesus, I am putting myself on the line here. I don't know what to do other than to say, you didn't get what you deserved and I fear that unless you say the word, I will get what I deserve. Like the thief on the cross, I am putting my hope and trust in you. I believe that you are the only one who can save me, the only one who will save me. Say the word, Lord Jesus and I am saved. Remember me, Jesus, remember me. Amen.

Day 4: Observer



Thomas was a close friend of Jesus. In fact, he was one of the twelve disciples who followed Jesus for three years. He listened to him speak, watched him do amazing things and learned the ways of God. His eyes were opened to the realities of how it all was going to end and how everything would be different in the world because of Jesus' mission.

Thomas was a practical man but was also a courageous man. When Jesus announced that he was going to Jerusalem for the Jewish Passover feast, the disciples, to a person, didn't think that it was a good idea. There were dangerous threats floating around regarding Jesus' safety. Going to Jerusalem was certain to put Jesus in danger, in fact, they all would likely die if they followed through with Jesus' plan. Finally, Thomas courageously announced,

“Let us also go, that we may die with him.” (John 11:16)

Thomas would have made an excellent scientist. He had a mindset that required proof. For him, proof required personal observation. So, after the other disciples reported that Jesus had risen from the dead, because Thomas was not there to see the evidence for himself, he would not believe.

Thomas has been called “Doubting Thomas” because of this incident. The word “doubting” is too generous. It would be more accurate to call him “No-Proof Thomas” or “Unbelieving Thomas.” His actions point to the fact that Thomas was prepared to write off Jesus, write off his experiences over the previous 3 years, write off his friends, everything, if he did not have the physical, eye-witness proof of Jesus' resurrection.

Thomas was an observer. He needed Jesus to make the first move, which is exactly what happened. Jesus showed up, when Thomas and the other disciples were together, a week after his initial appearance. (*see John 20:19-29*) This time Jesus went right to Thomas and invited him to see and touch and know that his unbelief could be transformed to belief.

If you are wrestling with unbelief, keep your eyes open and your ears tuned because you never know when you will encounter the truth of Jesus.

PRAYER

Jesus, you see my unbelief and my inability to prove the things that others tell me are true. So, it's your move. Come to me and show me through the eyes of faith, through your word and through prayer what I need to see. Tell me through the sound of truth what I need to know and understand. Help me with my unbelief. Amen.

Day 5: Observer



Saul was young, bright, promising, connected and likely a future leader of the Jewish people. He was a keen observer of all of the activities of “The Way,” that’s what the people who were followers of Jesus called themselves. Saul became the muscle, the Jewish law enforcement investigator, judge, jury and executioner. The Jewish leaders were happy to have such a strong force on their side to clean up the mess of the “Christ-ians.” The movement was spreading like a prairie fire and the only way they were going to stop it was to stomp it out with brutal force. Saul had the will and way to do it.

An observer like Saul was smart and his heavy-handed pursuit put fear into the hearts of the followers of Jesus. So when Saul got word of “The Way” gatherings in Damascus, he did not hesitate to engage his posse.

But if God chooses to get your attention, there are no plans that can get in the way. Saul was stopped dead in his tracks on the road. Blinded by a bright light from heaven, he encountered the risen Jesus. Everything changed, everything. No longer would Saul persecute Christians, now he joined them. No longer would he be the cruel enforcer of the Jewish leaders, now he would become public enemy number one. No longer would he deny the message of Jesus, now he would proclaim it until it killed him. No longer would he be known as Saul, now his name was changed to Paul. (*see Acts 9*)

The way of Christ is transformation. He calls all people to see the light of truth that changes everything. Your path is known by God and his will and purpose is right in front of you. Like Saul, you are loved and valued by God no matter what you have said or done, no matter how you have treated, taunted, or even persecuted the cause of Christ. Jesus wants to meet with you. Are you ready?

PRAYER

Jesus, I assume that you know my hardest questions, my deepest doubts and my strongest defense. Like Saul in the Bible, I am a person of conviction and want my life to mean something. So, let’s talk. I am ready. Amen.

Day 6: Observer



(see John 20:11-18)

Of all of Jesus followers, Mary Magdalene should not be classified as an observer. In many ways she wasn't but on Easter Sunday morning when she was alone in the garden outside the empty tomb of Jesus, the observer in her was crystal clear.

Mary was a brave woman who did not shy away from taking action. Her presence in Jesus' story, in and around the week before he was crucified, is important. We see her with Jesus' mother, Mary, and the other women. But she also is present with the disciples as well.

Her presence at the foot of Jesus' cross is significant because it was a fearful place to be. Not only because of the horrors of watching Jesus die but it was entirely possible that she and the other onlookers would be identified and arrested as well for their association with Jesus.

And then, she was alone weeping in the garden outside Jesus' empty tomb. She didn't know what to do, what to say, or where to go. Like anyone after a tragedy, you want to take action, you want to do something to help but you've got nothing, nothing to do, nothing to say, nowhere to go. It is no wonder that when "the gardener" talked to her she was confused.

"Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him." (John 20:15)

Mary had seen first hand the evidence of resurrection at the tomb. She had seen the deflated grave clothes. She had spoken with angels who told her plainly that Jesus was alive. But yet, after all that, she chose to believe that a gardener had somehow disarmed the Roman guards, moved the giant doorway stone and stolen Jesus' body. The only word that she needed to hear to change her wrong assumptions was her name, Mary.

The gardener spoke her name, "Mary." It was Jesus. Her wrong assumptions melted away. Her disbelief was transformed into belief. Never again would she simply observe. Now she would see with crystal clarity.

Listen for your name to be spoken, especially when you wrongly assume the worst.

He Knows My Name

*I have a Maker
He formed my heart
Before even time began
My life was in His hands*

*He knows my name
He knows my every thought
He sees each tear that falls
And hears me when I call*

*I have a Father
He calls me His own
He'll never leave me
No matter where I go*

*He knows my name
He knows my every thought
He sees each tear that falls
And hears me when I call*

Writer: Tommy Walker

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PRAYER

Jesus, say my name. Say my name when all I hear are lies. Say my name when I struggle with seeing the truth. Say my name when circumstances point to defeat. Say my name, and everything will change. Amen.

Day 7: Observer



(see Matthew 27:45-56)

He was an outsider and in every way an enemy of the faith. We don't know his name, only his rank, Centurion. He was a Roman, part of the occupying force that the Jewish people despised. He too was an observer. It was not his place to make policy only to carry those policies out. His assignment was one of the worst, overseeing the crucifixion of the dregs of this Jewish nation.

He had probably seen hundreds, perhaps thousands of crucifixions, especially if Golgotha was his post for very long. The patterns of death were predictable with only a few exceptions. Very likely he was aware of the notoriety of Jesus. He may have even walked the path from the judgment stone at Pilot's palace to the Place of the Skull.

He was certainly there when the nails were pounded and the cross was planted as Jesus entered his final hours. He was likely the one who gave the order to place the controversial sign over Jesus' head, "King of Jews." He was only following Pilot's orders, nothing more.

Like all crucifixion victims, Jesus suffered. Final words were spoken, friends and family wept. He had seen it before. The one comfort provided was a swallow of wine brushed on Jesus' lips lifted to him by the branch of a shrub dipped in wine vinegar. The Centurion had seen it all but this was different.

Fearful changes started happening as he watched Jesus struggle for breath. The sky went dark, scary dark. Fear gripped everyone including the Roman soldiers trained to endure every awful circumstance. The ground shook, the wind blew, the lightning exploded, the darkness closed in. Creation itself moaned as this man breathed his last.

That is when the Centurion, this enemy of the faith, this outsider of God's people, this observer said what every person of all times, tribe and nation will one day confess,

"Surely He is the Son of God." (Matthew 27:54)

PRAYER

Jesus, How am I to respond to what I have seen and heard? What I thought was certain is challenged by the realities of what I witness and more importantly, what I feel in my heart. I ask that you give me eyes to see you clearly. Give me the assurance that what you have said is true. Give me courage to stand on the hope of being with you one day in heaven. Amen.